

SPECIAL MEETING
FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL
May 23, 2002
Family Outreach
1212 Helena Avenue
Helena, MT

Members Present: Kelly Johnson (chair), Brian Lenhardt, Dan McCarthy, Sandi Marisdotter, Lucy Hart-Paulson, Ted Maloney, Gwen Beyer, Phyllis Astheimer, Sharon Wagner, Gerald Pease, Novalene Martin, Sue Forest, John Holbrook, Cris Volinkaty, Lynda Korth, Sylvia Danforth, Mike Cooney

Members Absent: Rene Lenhardt, Jackie Jandt, Ann Marie Johnson, Dr. Mary Anne Guggenheim, Millie Kindle, Shelley & Jay Korth, Patti Russ, Sandy McGennis, Denise King, Liz Harter

Others Present: Gail Gray, DPHHS Director; Joe Mathews, DSD Administrator; Jeff Sturm, DDP Director; Richard Van Haecke, Part C Coordinator/DDP Child & Family Services Specialist; Jackie Emerson, DDP Administrative Support; PLUK representative: Emmy Hayworth (by phone)

There were also concerned parents, family, and members of the public present.

Kelly welcomed all present and thanked them for coming. Introduced Gail Gray, Joe Mathews and Jeff Sturm who were there to discuss the budget cuts.

Gail: When the year end balance reaches less than 2% of the budget, we were asked to come up with plans to reduce our budget by 3% and 10%. The administrators have met with Chuck Swysgood and those suggested cuts will be made public tomorrow (24th). On June 16th the Legislative Finance committee will make recommendations, then the Governor will make recommendations, and then the Budget Office will certify the final version. If the cuts are not any deeper than we expect them to be, Part C will not be cut. This group is probably safer than most. There are 5 levels of cuts, with level 5 being the last to be cut. There is no one that has not been affected. Part C is at the top of the 5's which means that the cuts have to be much deeper before it will be affected.

(handout) From the Health Summit – Medicaid Investment Assessment chart – Gail explained the handout and the options shown. It would require cooperation by the participants and special legislation but not until next session. Meetings are being set up to study the possibilities but we don't have enough staff to devote to it in order to move more quickly.

Jeff: DDP is sitting better than most and we may have no cuts in services if we can absorb the budget cuts. Next, we would freeze slots. We have to look at how we do the least harm and minimize health and safety risks. The department has had major travel reductions, Title XX, and TANF reductions, plus we are going into a major lawsuit. Cuts are not decisions that any of us want to make. No one wants to have to decide who needs services less than others do. Often when we cut one area we create problems in another.

Joe: The Travis D lawsuit cost us \$18,000 last month. We now have a mediator and hope to see some movement soon.

Vicki: Have you thought about closing Eastmont?

Joe: Both Eastmont and MDC cuts are targeted higher up in the levels of cuts. Closing Eastmont has to be legislated. This issue will be a topic for discussion during the next legislative session.

Vicki: The long-term affect (of cutting Part C) is scary. The cuts will cause us to go back to more families separated.

Joe: Each Administrator feels their programs are most important. How do you put one program ahead of another?

Vicki: Will there be a special session if the cuts go to 4-5%?

Gail: If it were to go to 8-9% - no question. But 4-5% would not require a session.

Ted: Help us to understand the big picture, where is the problem? What can we do to be proactive?

Gail: Yes, we spent more than appropriated because our needs were greater. We have less revenue than expected – not from any one area. We can't fix these things. It will take legislative action. Start at the local level. We need to prioritize what the State pays for and look at different revenue. We now have more power in Congress than ever before. You need to show up at meetings with Conrad Burns and Max Baucus.

Cris: Representative Mike Mongon will be in our offices (CDC) this week if anyone wants to speak with him.

Parents and public guests were given a chance to share their views and experiences.

Gail: We have had these same discussions in our meetings. There will be impacts in other areas. As a former educator, I know what wonderful things early intervention and Part C have done. All the cuts are bad for someone. When the lists come out, look at them and then make specific suggestions.

Mike Cooney: Why there is no money is debatable. All are afraid to say they need to raise more taxes. If the legislature doesn't figure out a different way to deal with revenue, we will be back here next year. East Helena couldn't pass a mill levy and had to cut 1/3 of their teachers. The root is how to raise more money. Cutting taxes is good rhetoric.

Kelly: There are questions on the Council duties. We were not given a chance for input on recommendations, so what is the value of this council?

Gail: These proposals had to be done in a week. We can listen more if you have more specific suggestions. We need some solutions and support. Call the Governor. Tell the Legislators your views and experiences – they are the ones who can change things.

Jeff: The calls and letters to us can't change things, we feel like you do. And the public thinks that a 3% cut is not big.

Ted: The public doesn't understand what the Department has already done to reduce budgets.

Gail: Talk about cost shifts – if we don't provide services, they have to go somewhere else. State agencies and the Legislature understand that but not the public.

Gail, Joe and Jeff had to leave. All thanked them for coming and the Council took a break. After reconvening, the decision was made to send flowers to Gail and cards to Joe and Jeff to thank them all for coming to the meeting.

Ted made a motion to empower Kelly to make contact with Jackie Twining-Martin, our Part C Project Officer of the Office of Special Education, to provide information on state activities related to Part C in Montana.

2nd was made by Cris Volinkaty.

The motion passed by unanimous vote.

There will be a meeting with the Governor's Policy director. Several of the FSSAC members will be present.

There will be an email to everyone about the possibility of a June meeting close to the Legislative meeting scheduled for June 13th. **June 14th** was suggested as a possible date. (Need to include Emmy Hayworth.)

Minutes from the April 26th meeting were distributed, as well as other handouts from the last meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.